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## New Kalmykia Cinema

### Description



I had the distinct pleasure to sit down with Ella Manzheeva, writer and director of the Kalmykic film, *Chaiki*, or as it is often referred to *The Gulls*. The film is the story of Elsa, played by the exquisite Evgeniya Mandzhieva, as a fisherman's wife, in a seaside town in Kalmykia, a remote republic in Russia.

Interestingly, Kalmykia was settled four centuries ago as Mongolians began migrating due to civil strife. With a population around 150,000, according to Manzheeva, the region has a strong belief system steeped in the Buddhist tradition with a touch of local folklore. However, after the Stalin regime took hold of Russia, celebrating the traditions became stifled.

Unfortunately, this carries over to today. *Chaiki* is a return to Kalmykia traditions and celebratory beliefs as they intertwine in everyday life. Drawing on personal experiences and her own encounters from living in Kalmykia, Manzheeva penned the story in a mere five days driven by her passion and love for her Kalmykia. Accordingly, one of Manzheeva's hopes is to keep alive the unique customs and language system. She's been on the festival circuit for over a year beginning with the Karlov Vary International Film Festival in July of 2014 bringing her vision to the outside world.

Her message is finding an audience as Kalmykian ex-patriots are flocking to see *The Gulls* to get a glimpse of the homeland. Cinemas in Russia have started screening the film. Critics have taken note as this once barren cinematic region has awakened, taken root and sprouted through the Russian consciousness.

Manzheeva couldn't be happier and has a follow-up work in pre-production slated for the next Berlinale, Berlin's International Film Festival. See my review of *Chaiki* here on IMDB:

[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4436330/reviews?ref\\_=tt\\_ov\\_rt](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4436330/reviews?ref_=tt_ov_rt)

To learn more and/or for more information about this emerging regional cinema please contact:

Telesco Film at Mosfilm Film Studio

Moscow, Mosfilmovskaya 1

E-mail: [info@telestofilm.ru](mailto:info@telestofilm.ru)

Phone: +7 (499) 143-94-8

### **Category**

1. Uncategorized

### **Date Created**

November 12, 2015

### **Author**

hollywoodglee